

From the Wyoming Department of Health

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Prevention Works

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In 2002, the Wyoming Legislature made a deliberate decision to invest in preventing youth use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs such as methamphetamine. Legislators were alarmed by the increasing costs linked to illicit drug use they were seeing in law enforcement, child welfare, special education, the juvenile justice system, the courts and elsewhere across the state's budget. Everyone involved at the time was surprised by an analysis demonstrating that for every dollar spent to clean up the mess, Wyoming was investing only one cent on its prevention.

A rate of return can be measured for virtually any investment, whether it is real estate, bonds and stocks, fine art, and even Wyoming's investment in prevention. A decade ago Wyoming spent \$2.42 per capita on substance abuse prevention, treatment and research. The bulk of that expenditure, which was a third less than the national average, went almost entirely to treatment (which was then significantly under-funded as well).

Since 2002, Wyoming has nearly tripled its financial investment in substance abuse programs.

More than money has been invested. For example, Wyoming's First Lady Nancy Freudenthal has dedicated her time and name in tirelessly traveling the state, bringing communities to the table and raising public awareness of underage drinking issues. Individuals and groups in communities across the state have also invested their time, making prevention a key value.

The return on these investments of money and time shows they have paid off for youth and their families, their schools and communities. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey of Wyoming high school students reveals that between 1999 and 2009:

1. 30 days youth use of alcohol has **declined by 24 percent**
2. Lifetime alcohol use by youth has **declined 12.7 percent**
3. Meth use has **dropped 61 percent**
4. Binge drinking has **declined 30 percent**
5. Driving after drinking **dropped 44 percent**
6. Riding in a car driven by someone drinking **down 25 percent**
7. Smoking rates among youth have **declined by 37 percent since 1999** (though they have unfortunately increased a little over the last two years).

What does that mean to Wyoming's taxpayers? Previously, the budgetary burden of substance abuse was more than \$96 a year for every man, woman and child in the state. Eight years later, that burden has dropped 26 percent.

Youth use of tobacco, alcohol and other illicit drugs is a strong predictor of a range of problems. Youth who abuse these drugs often drop out of school, many engage in juvenile crime, a large number become alcohol dependent leading to a variety of job and relationship difficulties and the adult corrections system. Each of those possible outcomes poses significant impacts on the youth, the family, the community and the state's budget. Researchers at Iowa State University have calculated while the cost of prevention is approximately \$12,459 per disorder prevented, prevention resulted in a \$119,633 benefit to communities per alcohol disorder prevented -- a \$9.60 return on each dollar invested. The researchers found that life skills training intervention cost \$4,921 per methamphetamine use case prevented, but produced a \$130,013 employer benefit per methamphetamine user prevented -- a \$9.98 return on each dollar invested.

We know that if people make good choices about alcohol and drugs as youth, they are far less likely to make poor choices as adults. So these trend lines are a good predictor of a better future. Another way of looking at these numbers is through the eyes of the families involved. The statistics represent stories about real people; during the last decade, hundreds or thousands of Wyoming children who previously experimented with alcohol and others drugs are making healthier choices.

These accomplishments didn't happen by accident. State and local governments, community coalitions, law enforcement, the schools, courts, parents and the students worked together. It is my hope that this work continues in Wyoming and for Wyoming for many years to come.

So clip these statistics from the paper and the next time someone tells you government never does anything right or that prevention doesn't work...show them this...proudly.

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